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# Trans. of Jean Baudrillard's "Two Essays"

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## Jean Baudrillard

### Two Essays

*Translated by Arthur B. Evans*

#### 1. Simulacra and Science Fiction

There are three orders of simulacra:

(1) natural, naturalistic simulacra: based on image, imitation, and counterfeiting. They are harmonious, optimistic, and aim at the reconstitution, or the ideal institution, of a nature in God's image.

(2) productive, productionist simulacra: based on energy and force, materialized by the machine and the entire system of production. Their aim is Promethean: world-wide application, continuous expansion, liberation of indeterminate energy (desire is part of the utopias belonging to this order of simulacra).

(3) simulation simulacra: based on information, the model, cybernetic play. Their aim is maximum operationality, hyperreality, total control.

To the first order corresponds the imaginary of the utopia. To the second, SF in the strict sense. To the third...is there yet an imaginary domain which corresponds to this order? The probable answer is that the "good old" SF imagination is dead, and that something else is beginning to emerge (and not only in fiction, but also in theory). Both traditional SF and theory are destined to the same fate: flux and imprecision are putting an end to them as specific genres.

There is no real and no imaginary except at a certain distance. What happens when this distance, even the one separating the real from the imaginary, begins to disappear and to be absorbed by the model alone? Currently, from one order of simulacra to the next, we are witnessing the reduction and absorption of this distance, of this separation which permits a space for ideal or critical projection.

It is at a maximum in utopias, where a transcendent world, a radically different universe, is portrayed (its most individualized form remains the Romantic dream, wherein transcendence is represented in all its depth, even unto its subconscious structure; but, in all cases, the separation from the real world is maximal—it is the utopian island in contrast to the continent of the real).

It is diminished considerably in SF: SF only being, most often, an extravagant *projection* of, but qualitatively not different from, the real world of production. Extrapolations of mechanics or energy, velocities or powers

approaching infinity—SF's fundamental patterns and scenarios are those of mechanics, of metallurgy, and so forth. Projective hypostasis of the robot. (In the limited universe of the pre-Industrial era, utopias *counterposed* an ideal alternative world. In the potentially limitless universe of the production era, SF *adds* by multiplying the world's own possibilities.)

It is totally reduced in the implosive era of models. Models no longer constitute an imaginary domain with reference to the real; they are, themselves, an apprehension of the real, and thus leave no room for any fictional extrapolation—they are immanent, and therefore leave no room for any kind of transcendentalism. The stage is now set for simulation, in the cybernetic sense of the word—that is to say, for all kinds of manipulation of these models (hypothetical scenarios, the creation of simulated situations, etc.), but now *nothing distinguishes this management-manipulation from the real itself: there is no more fiction.*

Reality was able to surpass fiction, the surest sign that the imaginary has possibly been outpaced. But the real could never surpass the model, for the real is only a pretext of the model.

The imaginary was a pretext of the real in a world dominated by the reality principle. Today, it is the real which has become the pretext of the model in a world governed by the principle of simulation. And, paradoxically, it is the real which has become our true utopia—but a utopia that is no longer a possibility, a utopia we can do no more than dream about, like a lost object.

Perhaps the SF of this era of cybernetics and hyperreality will only be able to attempt to “artificially” resurrect the “historical” worlds of the past, trying to reconstruct *in vitro* and down to its tiniest details the various episodes of bygone days: events, persons, defunct ideologies—all now empty of meaning and of their original essence, but hypnotic with retrospective truth. Like the Civil War in Philip K. Dick's *The Simulacra*; like a gigantic hologram in three dimensions, where fiction will never again be a mirror held to the future, but rather a desperate rehallucinating of the past.

We can no longer imagine other universes; and the gift of transcendence has been taken from us as well. Classic SF was one of expanding universes: it found its calling in narratives of space exploration, coupled with more terrestrial forms of exploration and colonization indigenous to the 19th and 20th centuries. There is no cause-effect relationship to be seen here. Not simply because, today, terrestrial space has been virtually completely encoded, mapped, inventoried, saturated; has in some sense been shrunk by globalization; has become a collective marketplace not only for products but also for values, signs, and models, thereby leaving no room any more for the imaginary. It is not exactly because of all this that the exploratory universe (technical, mental, cosmic) of SF has also stopped functioning. But the two phenomena are closely linked, and they are two aspects of the same general evolutionary process: a period of implosion, after centuries of explosion and expansion. When a system reaches its limits, its own saturation point, a reversal begins to take place. And something happens also to the imagination.

Until now, we have always had large reserves of the imaginary, because the coefficient of reality is proportional to the imaginary, which provides the former with its specific gravity. This is also true of geographical and space exploration: when there is no more virgin ground left to the imagination, *when the map covers all the territory, something like the reality principle disappears*. The conquest of space constitutes, in this sense, an irreversible threshold which effects the loss of terrestrial coordinates and referentiality. Reality, as an internally coherent and limited universe, begins to hemorrhage when its limits are stretched to infinity. The conquest of space, following the conquest of the planet, promotes either the de-realizing of human space, or the reversion of it into a simulated hyperreality. Witness, for example, this two-room apartment with kitchen and bath launched into orbit with the last Moon capsule (raised to the power of space, one might say); the perceived ordinariness of a terrestrial habitat then assumes the values of the cosmic and its hypostasis in Space, the satellization of the real in the transcendence of Space—it is the end of metaphysics, the end of fantasy, the end of SF. The era of hyperreality has begun.

From this point on, something must change: the projection, the extrapolation, this sort of pantographic exuberance which made up the charm of SF are now no longer possible. It is no longer possible to manufacture the unreal from the real, to create the imaginary from the data of reality. The process will be rather the reverse: to put in place “decentered” situations, models of simulation, and then to strive to give them the colors of the real, the banal, the lived; to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because the real has disappeared from our lives. A hallucination of the real, of the lived, of the everyday—but reconstituted, sometimes even unto its most disconcertingly unusual details, recreated like an animal park or a botanical garden, presented with transparent precision, but totally lacking substance, having been derealized and hyperrealized.

True SF, in this case, would not be fiction in expansion, with all the freedom and “naïveté” which gave it a certain charm of discovery. It would, rather, evolve implosively, in the same way as our image of the universe. It would seek to revitalize, to reactualize, to rebanalize fragments of simulation—fragments of this universal simulation which our presumed “real” world has now become for us.

But where can one find fictional works which already incorporate this condition of reversion? Clearly, the short stories of Philip K. Dick “gravitate,” one might say, in this new space (although it can no longer be expressed as such because, in fact, this new universe is “anti-gravitational,” or, if it still gravitates, it does so around the *hole* of the real, around the *hole* of the imaginary). Dick does not create an alternate cosmos nor a folklore or a cosmic exoticism, nor intergalactic heroic deeds; the reader is, from the outset, in a total simulation without origin, past, or future—in a kind of flux of all coordinates (mental, spatio-temporal, semiotic). It is not a question of parallel universes, or double universes, or even of possible universes: not possible nor impossible, nor real nor unreal. It is *hyperreal*. It is a universe

of simulation, which is something altogether different. And this is so not because Dick speaks specifically of simulacra. SF has always done so, but it has always played upon the *double*, on artificial replication or imaginary duplication, whereas here the double has disappeared. There is no more double; one is always already in the other world, an other world which is not another, without mirrors or projection or utopias as means for reflection. The simulation is impassable, unsurpassable, *checkmated*, without exteriority. We can no longer move "through the mirror" to the other side, as we could during the golden age of transcendence.

Perhaps an even more convincing example would be Ballard and his fictional evolution from his earliest "fantasmagorical" short stories—poetic, dream-like, alienating—to *Crash*, which (even more than *High Rise* or *Concrete Island*) constitutes without doubt the contemporary model for this SF which is no longer SF. *Crash* is our world, nothing is really "invented" therein, everything is hyper-functional: traffic and accidents, technology and death, sex and the camera eye. Everything is like a huge simulated and synchronous machine; an acceleration of our own models, of all the models which surround us, all mixed together and hyper-operationalized in the void. What distinguishes *Crash* from almost all other SF, which still seem to revolve around the old (mechanical/mechanistic) duo of function vs. dysfunction, is that it projects into the future along the same lines of force and the same finalities as those of the "normal" universe. Fiction can go beyond reality (or inversely, which is more subtle), but according to the same rules of the game. But in *Crash*, there is neither fiction nor reality—a kind of hyperreality has abolished both. And therein lies the defining character, if there is one, of our contemporary SF. The same may be said, for example, of *Bug Jack Barron* or of certain passages in *Stand on Zanzibar*.

In point of fact, SF of this sort is no longer an elsewhere, it is an everywhere: in the circulation of models here and now, in the very axiomatic nature of our simulated environment. What SF author, for instance, would have "imagined" (although, to be precise, this is no longer "imaginable") the "reality" of West German simulacra-factories, factories which rehire unemployed people in all the roles and all the positions of the traditional manufacturing process, but who produce *nothing*, whose only activity involves chain-of-command games, competition, memos, account sheets, etc., all within a huge network? All material production is duplicated in a void (one of these simulacra-factories even went into "real" bankruptcy, laying off a second time its own unemployed workers). This, indeed, is simulation: not that these factories are fake, but that they are real—or hyperreal—and that, by being so, they send all "real" production, that of "serious" factories, into the same hyperreality. What is fascinating here is not the opposition of fake factories/real factories, but rather the indistinction between the two: the fact that all the rest of production has no more referentiality or profound finality than this "business simulacrum." It's the hyperrealist indifference that constitutes the true "science-fictional" quality of this episode. And one can see that there

is no need to invent it: it is here before us, rising out of a world without secrets, without depth.

Doubtlessly the most difficult thing today, in the complex universe of SF, is to be able to discern what still corresponds (and this is a large part of it) to the imaginary of the second order, the productive/projective order, and what is already arising from this indistinction of the imaginary, from this flux deriving from the third order of simulation. One can, for example, clearly discern the difference between machine robot-mechanics (characteristic of the second order) and cybernetic machines like computers which derive axiomatically from the third. But one order can easily contaminate the other, and the computer can very well function like a supermachine, a super-robot, a mechanical superpower: exhibiting the productive genius of the simulacra of the second order, not following the processes of pure simulation, and still bearing witness of the reflexes of a finalized universe (including ambivalence and revolt, like the computer in *2001* or Shalmanezzer in *Stand on Zanzibar*).

Between the *operatic* (the theatrical status, fantastic machinery, the “grand Opera” of technology), which corresponds to the first order, the *operative* (the industrial status, production and execution of power and energy), which corresponds to the second order, and the *operational* (the cybernetic status, uncertainty, the flux of the “meta-technological”), which corresponds to the third order, all kinds of interferences can be produced today within the SF genre. But only the last order should be of any genuine interest to us.

## 2. Ballard's *Crash*

From the classical (and even the cybernetic) viewpoint, technology is an extension of the body. It is the evolved functional capacity of a human organism which allows it both to rival Nature and to triumphantly remold it in its own image. From Marx to McLuhan, one sees the same instrumentalist vision of machines and of language: relays, extensions, media-mediators of a Nature destined ideally to become the organic body. In this “rational” view, the body itself is only a medium.

Inversely, in its baroque and apocalyptic treatment in *Crash*, technology is the deadly deconstruction of the body—no longer a functional medium, but an extension of death: dismemberment and mutilation, not in the pejorative vision of a lost unity of subject (which is still the perspective of psychoanalysis) but in the explosive vision of a body given over to “symbolic wounds,” a body commixed with technology's capacity for violation and violence and in the brutal surgery that it continually performs in creating incisions, excisions, scar tissue, gaping body holes—of which sexual wounds and sensual pleasures are only a case in point (and the mechanical servitude in the workplace, the palliated caricature)—a body with neither organs nor organ pleasures, entirely dominated by gash marks, excisions, and technical scars—all under the gleaming sign of a sexuality that is without referentiality and without limits.

Her mutilation and death became a coronation of her image at the hands of a colliding technology, a celebration of her individual limbs and facial planes, gestures and skin tones. Each of the spectators at the accident site would carry away an image of the violent transformation of this woman, of the complex wounds that fused together her own sexuality and the hard technology of the automobile. Each of them would join his own imagination, the tender membranes of his mucous surfaces, his groves of erectile tissue, to the wounds of this minor actress through the medium of his own motorcar, touching them as he drove in a medley of stylized postures. Each would place his lips on those bleeding apertures...press his eyelids against the exposed tendon of her forefinger, the dorsal surface of his erect penis against the ruptured lateral walls of her vagina. The automobile crash had made possible the final and longed-for union of the actress and the members of her audience. (§20:189-90)<sup>1</sup>

The technological is never grasped except by (auto) accident, in other words by the violence done to itself and the violence done to the body. It is all identical: all shocks, all collisions, all impacts, all the metallurgy of accidents is inscribed in a semiurgy of the body—not in anatomy or physiology, but in a semiurgy of contusions, scars, mutilations, and wounds which are like new sexual organs opened in the body. Thus, the codifying of the body as workforce in the order of production is replaced by the dispersion of the body as anagram in the order of mutilation. Gone are the “erogenous zones”: everything becomes a hole for reflex discharges. But above all (as in primitive initiatory tortures, unlike our own), the entire body becomes a sign which offers itself in the exchange of body language. Bodies and technology each diffracting through the other their own frantic symbols. Carnal abstractions and designs.

There is no affectivity behind all this: no psychology, no ambivalence or desire, no libido or death-drive. Death is a natural implication in this limitless exploration of the possible forms of violence done to the body, but this is never (as in sadism or masochism) what the violence purposely and perversely aims at, never a distortion of sense and sex (in comparison to what?). There is no repressed unconscious (affective or representational) therein, except via a second reading which would necessarily reinject still more twisted meaning in order to conform to the psychoanalytical model. The nonsensicalness, the brutality, of this mixture of body and technology is totally immanent—it is the reversion of one into the other. And an unprecedented sort of sexuality results from this, a kind of potential dizziness linked to the pure inscription of the body's non-existent signs: a ritual symbolism of incisions and brands, like in the graffiti of the subways of New York.

Another point in common: in *Crash*, the reader needs no longer to contend with accidental signs that would appear only on the margins of the system. The Accident portrayed here is no longer the haphazard bricolage that it still is in most highway accidents—the bricolage of the new leisure class's death drive. The car is not the appendix of an immobile domestic universe: there are no more private and domestic universes, only figures of incessant circulation, and the Accident is everywhere as irreversible and fundamental trope, the banalizing of the anomaly of death. It is no longer on the margins; it is at the

heart. It is no longer the exception to a triumphant rationality; it has become the Rule, it has devoured the Rule. It's not even any longer the "accursed part," the part conceded to fate by the system itself and calculated into its general reckoning. All is inverted. Here it is the Accident which gives life its very form; it is the Accident, the irrational, which is *the sex of life*. And the automobile itself—this magnetized sphere which ends up creating an entire universe of tunnels, expressways, overpasses, on and off ramps by treating its mobile cockpit as a universal prototype—is only an immense metaphor of the same.

There is no possibility of dysfunction in the universe of the accident; thus no perversion either. The Accident, like death, is no longer of the order of the neurotic, of the repressed, of the residual, or of the transgressive; it is the initiator of a new manner of *non-perverted* pleasure (contrary to what the author himself says in his introduction when he speaks of a new perverse logic, one must resist the *moral* temptation of reading *Crash* as perversion), of a strategic reorganization of life beyond the perspective of death. Death, wounds, mutilations are no longer metaphors for castration—it's exactly the reverse, or even more than the reverse. Only fetishist metaphors are perversion: seduction by the model, by the interposed fetish, or by the medium of language. Here, death and sex are read straight from the body, without fantasy, without metaphor, without phraseology—in contrast, for example, to the Machine in Kafka's *The Penal Colony*, where the body, via its wounds, is still the locus of textual inscription. Therefore, on the one hand, the machine of Kafka is still puritanical, repressive, "a signifying machine" as Deleuze would say, whereas the technology of *Crash* is glistening and seductive, or unpolished and innocent. Seductive because it has been stripped of meaning, a simple mirror of torn bodies. And the body of Vaughan is likewise a mirror of twisted chrome, crumpled fenders, and semen-tarnished sheet-metal. Bodies and technology fused, seduced, inextricable one from the other.

As Vaughan turned the car into a filling station courtyard the scarlet light from the neon sign over the portico flared across these grainy photographs of appalling injuries: the breasts of teenage girls deformed by instrument binnacles, the partial mammoplasties of elderly housewives carried out by the chromium louvres of windshield assemblies, nipples sectioned by manufacturers' dashboard medallions; injuries to male and female genitalia caused by steering wheel shrouds, windshields during ejection...photographs of mutilated penises, sectioned vulvas and crushed testicles passed through the flaring light....In several of the photographs the source of the wound was indicated by a detail of that portion of the car which caused the injury: beside a casualty ward photograph of a bifurcated penis was an inset of a handbrake unit; above a close-up of a massively bruised vulva was a steering-wheel boss and its manufacturer's medallion. These unions of torn genitalia and sections of car body and instrument panel formed a series of disturbing modules, units in a new currency of pain and desire. (§14:134)

Every gash mark, every bruise, every scar left on the body is an artificial invagination, like those of the ritual scarrings of aborigines which serve as a



vehement answer to the absence of body. Only the wounded body can exist symbolically, for itself and for others; "sexual desire" is nothing but this possibility of bodies to mix and exchange their signifiers. And these few natural orifices which we are accustomed to associate with sex and sexual activities are nothing in comparison to all these potential wounds, to all these artificial orifices (but why "artificial"?), to all these openings through which the body turns itself inside out and, like certain topologies, no longer possesses an inside or an outside. Sex, as conceived here, is only an inferior and specialized definition comprising all the symbolic and sacrificial practices that a body can open itself up to—not via nature, but via artifice, simulation, and accident. Sex is no more than the rarefaction of a drive called desire in pre-prepared zones. It is largely surpassed by the wide range of symbolic wounds which, in a sense, are the "anagrammatization" of sex over the entire body. But then, of course, it is no longer sex; it is something else. Sex itself is only the inscription of a privileged signifier and of a few secondary marks—nothing in comparison to all the marks and wounds that a body is capable of.

Aborigines knew how to use their entire bodies toward this end through tattooing, torture, and initiatory rites: sexuality was only one of the many possible metaphors of this symbolic exchange, and neither the most meaningful nor the most prestigious (as it has become for us, in its realist and obsessional referentiality, because of our organic and functional treatment of it, including orgasms).

As the car travelled for the first time at twenty miles an hour Vaughan drew his fingers from the girl's vulva and anus, rotated his hips and inserted his penis in her vagina. Headlamps flared above us as the stream of cars moved up the slope of the overpass. In the rear-view mirror I could still see Vaughan and the girl, their bodies lit by the car behind, reflected in the black trunk of the Lincoln and a hundred points of the interior trim. In the chromium ashtray I saw the girl's left breast and erect nipple. In the vinyl window gutter I saw deformed sections of Vaughan's thighs and her abdomen forming a bizarre anatomical junction. Vaughan lifted the young woman astride him, his penis entering her vagina again. In a triptych of images reflected in the speedometer, the clock and the revolution counter, the sexual act between Vaughan and this young woman took place in the hooded grottoes of these luminescent dials, moderated by the surging needle of the speedometer....As I propelled the car at fifty miles an hour along the open deck of the overpass Vaughan arched his back and lifted the young woman into the full glare of the headlamps behind us. Her sharp breasts flashed within the chromium and glass cage of the speeding car. Vaughan's strong pelvic spasms coincided with the thudding passage of the lamp standards anchored in the overpass at hundred-yard intervals. As each one approached his hips kicked into the girl, driving his penis into her vagina, his hands splaying her buttocks to reveal her anus as the yellow light filled the car. (§15:143)

Here, all the erotic vocabulary is technical: not ass, prick, or cunt, but anus, rectum, penis, vulva. No slang, no intimacy in the sexual violence, only functional language: equivalency of chrome and mucous membranes. And it

is the same with the congruity of death and sex: rather than being described with pleasure, they are melded together into a kind of highly technical construct. No sexual pleasure, just discharge, plain and simple. And the copulations and semen which fill this book have no more sensual value than the outlines of wounds have the value of violence, even metaphorical. They are only signatures. (In the final scene, the narrator imprints a number of wrecked cars with his semen-soaked hand.)

Sexual pleasure (perverse or not) has always been mediated by a technical apparatus, by a mechanical process, of real objects but most often of fantasies; it always involves an intermediary manipulation of scenes or gadgets. Here, sexual pleasure is only climax; in other words, it operates on the same wavelength as the violence of a technical apparatus; the two are homogenized by technology and encapsulated into one object: the automobile.

We had entered an immense traffic jam. From the junction of the motorway and Western Avenue to the ascent ramp of the flyover the traffic lanes were packed with vehicles, windshields leaching out the molten colours of the sun setting above the western suburbs of London. Brake-lights flared in the evening air, glowing in the huge pool of cellulosed bodies. Vaughan sat with one arm out of the passenger window. He slapped the door impatiently, pounding the panel with his fist. To our right the high wall of a double-decker airline coach formed a cliff of faces. The passengers at the windows resembled rows of the dead looking down at us from the galleries of a columbarium. The enormous energy of the twentieth century, enough to drive the planet into a new orbit around a happier star, was being expended to maintain this immense motionless pause. (§17:151)

Around me, down the entire length of Western Avenue, along both ramps of the flyover, stretched an immense congestion of traffic held up by the accident. Standing in the centre of this paralyzed hurricane, I felt completely at ease, as if my obsessions with the endlessly multiplying vehicles had at last been relieved. (§17:156)

However, there exists another dimension in *Crash* which is inseparable from those mixing the technical and the sexual (united in this mourning-less work of death): the dimension of photography and cinema. The shining, saturated surface of traffic patterns and accidents is without depth, but it always takes on depth in the lens of Vaughan's movie camera. He collects and classifies stills of accidents, like ID cards. The continual rehearsal of the crucial event that he is plotting (his automotive death and the simulated death of the movie star Elizabeth Taylor in a crash involving her, a crash meticulously simulated and perfected during the course of months) takes place within the focus of the cinematographic. This universe would be nothing without this hyper-realistic detached long-shot viewing angle. The added depth and the raising of the visual medium to the second order can, by itself, suffice to fuse together technology, sex, and death. But in fact, the photo here is neither a medium nor an order of representation. It is neither a "supplementary" abstraction of the image, nor a compulsion for spectacle, and the position of Vaughan is never that of a voyeur or a pervert. The roll of film (like

transistorized music in cars and apartments) is part of the universal film of life, hyperreal, metallic, and corporal, made up of movement and flux. The photo is no more a medium than is the technology or the body—all are simultaneous in this universe where the anticipation of an event coincides with its reproduction, and even with its “real” occurrence. Depth of time is abolished as well: much like the past, the future ceases to exist. Actually, it is the camera-eye which replaces time, along with all other expressions of depth like affectivity, space, language. It is not an alternate dimension; it simply signifies that this universe is without secrets.

The mannequin rider sat well back, the onrushing air lifting his chin. His hands were shackled to the handlebars like a kamikaze pilot's. His long thorax was plastered with metering devices. In front of him, their expressions equally vacant, the family of four mannikins sat in their vehicle. Their faces were marked with cryptic symbols.

A harsh whipping noise came towards us, the sound of the metering coils skating across the grass beside the rail. There was a violent metal explosion as the motorcycle struck the front of the saloon car. The two vehicles veered sideways towards the line of startled spectators. I regained my balance, involuntarily holding Vaughan's shoulder, as the motorcycle and its driver sailed over the bonnet of the car and struck the windshield, then careened across the roof in a black mass of fragments. The car plunged ten feet back on its hawsers. It came to rest astride the rails. The bonnet, windshield and roof had been crushed by the impact. Inside the cabin, the lopsided family lurched across each other, the decapitated torso of the front-seat woman passenger embedded in the fractured windshield.

The engineers waved to the crowd reassuringly and moved towards the motorcycle, which lay in its side fifty yards behind the car. They began to pick up the sections of the cyclist's body, tucking the legs and head under their arms. Shavings of fibreglass from its face and shoulders speckled the glass around the test car like silver snow, a death confetti....

Helen Remington held my arm. She smiled at me, nodding encouragingly as if urging a child across some mental hurdle. “We can have a look at it again on the Ampex. They're showing it in slow-motion. (§13:124-25)

In *Crash*, everything is hyper-functional: traffic and accidents, technology and death, sex and simulation are all like one single, huge synchronous machine. It is the same universe as the *hyper-market*, where merchandise becomes hyper-merchandise—in other words, it and the entire atmosphere surrounding it are always already caught up in the continuous figures of circulation. But at the same time, the functionalism of *Crash* devours its own rationality, since it does not treat the dysfunctional. It is a radicalized functionalism, a functionalism that reaches its paradoxal limits and then burns them away. Thus, it becomes an undefinable object, and hence fascinating. Not good, not bad: ambivalent. Like death or fashion, it becomes a *short-cut* (in contrast to the good old functionalism which, even while much debated, is no longer one at all); in other words, a more rapid road than the main highway, or going where the main highway doesn't go, or, better yet (to parody Littré in a pataphysical manner<sup>5</sup>) “a road going nowhere, but going there faster than the others.”

This is what distinguishes *Crash* from most other SF works; the latter still seem to revolve around the same old duo of function/dysfunction, which they project into the future along the same lines of force and the same finalities as that of the normal universe. Fiction going beyond reality (or the inverse), but according to the same rules of the game. In *Crash*, there is neither fiction nor reality—a kind of hyper-reality has abolished both. Even critical regression is no longer possible. This mutating and commutating world of simulation and death, this violently sexualized world totally lacking in desire, full of violent and violated bodies but curiously neutered, this chromatic and intensely metallic world empty of the sensorial, a world of hyper-technology without finality—is it good or bad? We can't say. It is simply fascinating, without this fascination implying any kind of value judgment whatsoever. And this is the miracle of *Crash*. The moral gaze—the critical judgmentalism that is still a part of the old world's functionality—cannot touch it. *Crash* is hypercritical, in the sense of being beyond the critical (and even beyond its own author, who, in the introduction, speaks of this novel as “cautionary, a warning against that brutal, erotic and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape”: Introduction to *Crash* 6). Few books, few films attain this level of absence of all finality and critical negativity, this unpolished splendor of ordinariness and violence: *Nashville*, *A Clockwork Orange*.

After Borges, but in a totally different register, *Crash* is the first great novel of the universe of simulation, the world that we will be dealing with from now on: a non-symbolic universe but one which, by a kind of reversal of its mass-mediated substance (neon, concrete, cars, mechanical eroticism), seems truly saturated with an intense initiatory power.

The last of the ambulances drove away, its siren wailing. The spectators returned to their cars, or climbed the embankment to break in the wire fence. An adolescent girl in a denim suit walked past us, her young man with an arm around her waist. He held her right breast with the back of his hand, stroking her nipple with his knuckles. They stepped into a beach buggy slashed with pennants and yellow paint and drove off, horn tooting eccentrically.... This pervasive sexuality filled the air, as if we were members of a congregation leaving after a sermon urging us to celebrate our sexualities with friends and strangers, and were driving into the night to imitate the bloody eucharist we had observed with the most unlikely partners. (§17:157)

#### NOTES (by ABE)

1. J.G. Ballard. *Crash*. NY: Vintage Books, 1985. Reprint of the first edition (NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1973) plus author's introduction, which originally appeared in the first French edition (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1974).

2. Littré: a respected French dictionary. Pataphysical: referring to Pataphysics, a parodic pseudo-science invented by the French satirist Alfred Jarry, who defined it as “the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter's limitation.... Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe that can be—and perhaps should be—envisaged in the place of the traditional

one....Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments." (Roger Shattuck & Simon Tayler, eds., *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. NY: Grove Press, 1965, pp. 192-93).

## RÉSUMÉS

Jean Baudrillard. **Simulacres et science-fiction.**—Dans l'ordre hyperréel des simulacres qui est dirigé par des systèmes de contrôle informatiques et cybernétiques, la réalité est de plus en plus déterminée par des modèles (plutôt que l'inverse). La distance qui sépare le réel (les faits) et l'imaginaire (la fiction) disparaît, et avec elle l'espace discursif traditionnel utilisé par les utopies et la SF classique. La SF ne peut plus fournir un modèle imaginaire du réel parce que celui-ci est déjà, lui-même, un produit des modèles. Le nouveau rôle de la SF est de représenter cet effacement de la distance entre la fiction et les faits. (ICR/ABE)

Jean Baudrillard. **Crash de Ballard.**—Le roman *Crash de Ballard* renverse la perspective traditionnelle de la technologie comme extension fonctionnelle du corps. Dans *Crash*, corps et technologie se mêlent (littéralement et métaphoriquement) en une symbolisation générale et sans psychologie, symbolisation de la violence et de la mutilation érotique, exemplifiée par l'auto-accident/ l'accident d'auto. Des véhicules organiques et inorganiques se pénètrent l'un l'autre, créant un lieu de puissance initiatique ainsi qu'une voie de ritualisation pour les objets médiateurs de masse. Le roman *Crash* représente donc la SF comme hyperréalité virtuelle où la dynamique de l'implosion remplace celles de l'extrapolation. (ICR/ABE)

**Abstract.**—In the hyperreal order of simulations, which is governed by informatic and cybernetic control systems, reality is increasingly determined by models (rather than the reverse). The distance separating the real (fact) and the imaginary (fiction) collapses, and with it the discursive space traditionally used by utopias and classical SF. SF can no longer supply an imaginary model of the real because the latter, itself, is the product of models. SF is now called upon to portray this breakdown of the distance between fiction and fact. (ICR)

**Abstract.**—Ballard's *Crash* inverts the traditional view of technology as a functional extension of the body. The body and technology mingle (both literally and metaphorically) in a generalized psychology-free symbolization of violence and erotic mutilation exemplified by the auto (auto-) accident. Organic and inorganic vehicles interpenetrate, creating a locus of initiatory power and a path of ritualization for mass-mediated objects. *Crash* thus represents SF as virtual hyperreality where the dynamics of implosion replace those of extrapolation. (ICR)